



STORY RELEASE

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Local Pioneer Inspires Special Warfare Command

One of the first 17 black students to integrate all-white schools in Norfolk

By: Naval Special Warfare Group TWO Public Affairs Officer

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. – Personally affected by a decision 50 years ago, Patricia Turner spoke to a Special Warfare command Feb. 25 about how the Brown v. Board of Education ruling would forever change her life.

Speaking to over 75 members of Naval Special Warfare Group TWO (NSWG-2) during the command's Black History Month Celebration, Turner described her experience of being one of only 17 black children to bear the burden of integrating the Norfolk, Va. public school system.

"I had to take a two and half hour bus ride to get to Ruffner Elementary School," said Turner. Ruffner was one of three all-black schools in Norfolk in 1958. "My mother asked if I wanted to go to a school six blocks away. I said, 'yes'," Turner said. "I didn't realize what I was saying yes to."

On her first day to attend an all-white school, Turner walked hand-in-hand with her younger brother. Three other black children would join them to integrate the same all-white school. As the five children neared the imaginary line that separated the white and black neighborhoods, Turner now knew nothing would ever be same.

"As we neared the enemy line," said Turner, referring to the imaginary line that separated the two neighborhoods, "we didn't see the white children that normally harassed us."

Instead, on this day, it was white adults. The adults yelled out insults and threw sticks at them. As sticks rained down on them, Turner and the children plowed on.

As the five black children reached Norview Junior High School, numerous insulting posters and signs greeted them. Her brother and the three other black children headed for the seventh grade. Turner would now be on her own.

Turner, at the age of 14, would start the eighth grade Feb. 2, 1959, as the only black student in her class.

Her white classmates ignored her – moving their desks away from hers, taking curious routes to avoid walking near her and breathing the same air. Outside the classroom, the

white children were cruel and taunted her almost every day. They stuck gum in her hair, threw pennies at her, spit, and cursed her.

In high school, things would get better, but a lot remained the same. Turner made the first team in field hockey, but never played a single game.

“I was the team’s best right winger, but never got to play in a game because the other white teams refused to play Norview if they allowed a black girl to play. We won the State Championship my senior year and I never got to play in a game,” Turner said.

She was told not to attend the high school prom.

Turner, now 59, left Norfolk after high school for Richmond, and would later end up in Philadelphia, attending business college and then nursing school. She returned to Norfolk in 1976 to continue her work as a pediatric nurse, but in 1990, she became a teacher and now teaches in Norfolk at Blair Middle School.

“I teach now because I love people,” she said. “You could be green, and I would love you; it wouldn’t matter (color of skin).”

“I am honored to be here and share my story. But there are stories that are worse than mine. And there is a battle that is still going on,” Turner told the command as she wrapped up her comments.

“We all have to learn how to get along with each other.” Turner finished by saying we should embrace one another and celebrate our differences.

“It was an incredible and touching story,” said (SW/AW) Aerographer’s Mate 1st Class John Eleby. “I didn’t know all that they had to go through.”

“I learned how good we have it today. We don’t have to through the same boundaries today because of people like Ms. Turner,” Eleby stated.

Yeoman 3rd Class Zakiya Harris, NSWG-2’s Black History Month chairman, stated having Ms. Turner speak during the celebration was a special treat.

“Ms. Turner is an inspiring hero!” said Harris. “I couldn’t imagine going through one day of such an ordeal, but she had the courage to endure those conditions every day, and at the age of 14.”

“I think of all the dances I went to, the two sports I played, and the numerous school activities I attended, and it never crossed my mind that I could have been denied these things,” Harris said.

Immediately preceding Turner’s inspirational comments were presentations about other influential black individuals who had to overcome enormous obstacles to obtain greatness. Presentations featured the president of the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People, tennis stars Venus and Serena Williams, and one presentation was a personal recognition.

“I have chosen to speak about my grandfather because of the respect I have for him and how he helped out his community,” said Information Systems Technician 2nd Class Raymond Barnes, who spoke about his grandfather, James Dunlop. Mr. Dunlop created a task group that founded the Jacer Inn Family Retreat, which is located 36 miles west of Indianapolis, in Roachdale, Indiana.

The Jacer Inn Family Retreat is for inter-city families who need an affordable place to get away from the daily stresses of life and into a different, positive setting. The retreat offers year-round youth and adult programs designed to strengthen and preserve family life by developing positive inner resources to cope with stressful situations.

“Ms. Turner is a true hero. Her continued persistence and courage in the constant face of adversity integrating the Norfolk public school system is inspiring. Her message challenged all who were in attendance,” said CAPT. (SEAL) Chaz Heron, Chief Staff Officer for NSWG-2.

“I salute each of you,” Turner said. “Each of you has a place in my heart.” Turner’s father retired after a 30-year Naval career as a Master Chief in the submariner community.

“The Navy is doing something right because it was not always like this before,” Turner told the group as she referred to the strides the Navy has made over the years on the issues of race and gender.

“Today is truly an uplifting day,” said Harris.

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For more information on Naval Special Warfare, visit the website: www.seal.navy.mil